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SUBJECT: RAISED VOICES AND HOSTILITY REVEALED AT AEC PLENARY

1. (SBU) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: The 23rd session of the Assessment and Evaluation's (AEC) plenary session led to many tense moments on peripheral issues such as: the approval of prior minutes; the AEC chairman's independence; and the status of the working groups' reports on 'the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) after two years.' Given that the meeting focused more on process than substance, the hostile and aggressive tone of the meeting was both unexpected and unusual. The strong emotions, raised voices, and heated exchanges, especially initiated by the National Congress Party (NCP) representatives, signals that the tone of the these meetings needs to improve as the AEC seeks to effectively support CPA implementation. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

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STARTING OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT  
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2. (U) The AEC meeting started off with a tense exchange between Chairman Vraalsen and NCP representative Idris Abdelgadir, a State Minister at the Presidency, on suggested amendments to the draft minutes from the AEC Plenary Session held on May 15, 2007. Although the actual point of disagreement was not discussed, Abdelgadir adamantly insisted that if a party does not agree to the minutes, they cannot be considered an official record of the meeting. Chairman Vraalsen asserted that at least three note takers record the proceedings of all AEC meetings and that they are an accurate record. After a heated exchange, the debate ended with Vraalsen declaring that the minutes are not approved, and sarcastically saying, "Thank you for that pleasant exchange."

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT  
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3. (U) Vraalsen opened his formal remarks saying that the current tone of the AEC and CPA implementation is marked by "patience, but with an under current of growing impatience." He listed his meetings in August which included visits with: the special envoy to Sudan, Daniel Arap Moi (reftel A); the National Constitutional Review Commission (NCRC); the former chairman of Fiscal and Financial Allocation and Monitoring Commission (FFAMC); and the Chairman of the Statistical Bureaus of the North and South. [The full text of the Chairman's report has been sent to AF/SPG.]

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CONTROLLING THE CHAIRMAN  
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4. (U) Vraalsen ended his remarks describing the Sudanese Office of the Presidency's attempt to control his attendance and public remarks at regional meetings. Vraalsen stated that the African Union invited him to make a presentation to the African Union's Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) about CPA implementation previously scheduled for August 22nd. Although Vraalsen had to decline the invitation due to other obligations, he reported that Vice President Ali Osman Taha told him that the AU "had no right to

convene such a meeting without consultations with the GNU" and that Vraalsen would need prior approval of both his attendance and expected public remarks at such meetings from the office of the Presidency of Sudan. Vraalsen stated that Taha's actions and a later letter from General Bakri Hassan Salih raises questions concerning "the working methods, the authority, and the work space of the Chairman of the AEC." Vraalsen then stated, "In view of the importance of these questions, I have found it correct to bring the issue to the attention of my employer, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

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STATUS OF WORKING GROUP REPORTS  
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15. (U) The remainder of the meeting focused on status updates from the various groups on the 'CPA implementation report after 2 years.' All working groups (i.e. the Three Areas, the Security, the Wealth Sharing, and the Power Sharing groups) reported that having received input from both the SPLM and the NCP, the reports are almost complete. Several working group coordinators stated that finalizing the reports remains a final, and often highly contested, challenge. NCP representatives voiced their concern that the coordinators were bypassing their mandate in becoming "mediators," that the SPLM took too long to provide their input, and that mutually agreed upon language was later changed to benefit the SPLM. Vraalsen expressed frustration that the reports have taken 10 months to get to this stage and questioned whether it would be better just to cancel the reports all together. This drew a quick response from the NCP who reconfirmed their support for drafting the report, stated that their party has held extensive consultations with each coordinator, and repeated that the SPLM was responsible for delays in submitting comments and input.

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AEC TRANSPARENCY AND MEDIA ACCESS  
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17. (SBU) COMMENT: Throughout the meeting, the NCP representatives provoked many loud and angry exchanges. The debates about Vraalsen's autonomy and AEC transparency appear to indicate that the NCP representatives want to control information coming out of the AEC, and may also signal an underlying hostility towards Chairman Vraalsen and the authority he wields. Although the NCP representatives were responsible for initiating the draft minutes of the 23rd AEC Plenary meeting have been sent to AF/SPG. END NOTE.

POWERS